

Review: Eleuterio Toro, *Exiliado en Buckingham Palace (An Exile in Buckingham Palace)*

(Eleuterio Toro, 2020). ISBN: 979-8687580625 (paperback), £14.99, 461 pages.

Gloria Miqueles¹



Exiliado en Buckingham Palace (An Exile in Buckingham Palace) by Eleuterio Toro, is an autobiography which takes us through the amazing journey of a Chilean life. Beginning with his life in the countryside as a peasant child where poverty was abundant, it takes us through his time of political awakening, support of a progressive government, and his persecution by a brutal dictatorship, to his exile in the U.K.

Toro is a well-known and widely recognised mathematician, who has spent many years researching the construction of computational methods, with a long and impressive trajectory into areas that are a complete mystery to me. A prolific writer of scientific books, with hundreds of articles to his credit, this biographical book is far removed from what he is used to writing. But Toro is, above all, a Chilean with a long and tough political journey that forced him into exile.

This story of his exile reminds us how hard life is for people who have been forced to leave their country. It will make the reader pay close attention to the news that the Home Office has

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published plans for 'new' legislation to change the UK's immigration system, measures that were previously rejected as causing grave harm to the people in need of asylum in the UK.

Toro's life in exile will sound familiar to other exiles from all walks of life, wherever they came from and whatever the circumstances that brought them to their country of destination. It helps us understand the psychological impact of not having a choice and of being forced to leave your home country to face the unknown. It also highlights the associated hardships in facing a different culture and an unknown language.

The author gives us an insight into his life before arriving in the UK. His nightmare started immediately after the coup d'état in September 1973, led by General Augusto Pinochet, that overthrew the legitimately elected socialist president Salvador Allende (1970-1973). Toro's name appeared repeatedly on a list read on the radio calling him to make his way to the barracks of the Tucapel Regiment in Temuco city. Despite avoiding arrest several times, he ended up being kidnapped and tortured twice. While under house arrest, he escaped to Santiago, fleeing for his life. He lived underground until he was able to leave the country via Argentina and make his way to England.

Life as a refugee is hard and includes a fair degree of discrimination, racism, and resentment (sometimes overt, sometimes hidden) from locals towards those 'bloody foreigners', and in his case from some, probably very jealous, colleagues. But what Toro emphasises in his account of exile in England is that you will also find English people with a big heart, who will give you the solidarity that helps to overcome obstacles. His example shows us that although it is not easy, refugees can achieve their potential and succeed in whatever path they choose to follow and they will be good at it, or excellent like Toro. But be warned: the journey is an uphill struggle.

This story of exile shows us that it was not only the opportunities presented to Toro that enabled him to succeed, for example the grant awarded by the World University Service, but also his resilience and determination. He achieved the highest professional accolade and was honoured with an OBE (The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire is a British honour presented by the Queen). His acceptance of the OBE was not well received by Chileans who are not keen on the Monarchy.

I would highly recommend this book to all generations of exiles. It is a bit long, and the author has left some gaps in the narrative which the reader might have liked included to satisfy their curiosity. Nonetheless, I believe it makes particularly good reading and is a source of hope and guidance for those who are starting their refugee journey in the UK. And for those who have gone through similar experiences it is a reminder of the importance of our own stories and will hopefully offer a stimulus to write them down and keep the memories alive. It is in remembering our stories that we can say, "never again!"